

sound the Americans, telling them that you
-will supply the most
lively and interesting book I have yet
written."

About this time Zola also gave some
attention to a four-
act lyrical drama entitled "Messidor,"¹ the
music of which
was composed by his friend M. Alfred
Bruneau.² This
work took the novelist to the Grand Opera
House, where it
was to be produced. He attended all the
rehearsals, and
evinced particular interest in the young
women of the
ballet, about whom — their appearance,
manners, conversa-
tion, and lives — he accumulated a quantity of
notes, with
the object, so he afterwards told Vizetelly, of
writing a novel
about them, a novel which he would probably
have called
"Le Eat," — *rats de V Opera*, being the name
under which
the minor dancers of the house have long
been, known in
Paris. It may be mentioned that a ballet
designed for
expressive character-dancing was a prominent
feature of
"Messidor," and that success largely depended
on its effi-
cient performance. But the authors found
the *corps de*
ballet wedded to the stereotyped forms of stage-
dancing,
the customary insipid *jete**, *pecs de ckales*,
entrechats, *pirou-*
ettes, and so forth. Either from incapacity or in
a spirit of
obstinacy, the ladies of the opera would not
modify their
methods, and Zola, who had dreamt of
revolutionising stage-
dancing, of infusing into it some of the old
Grecian fervour,

which expressed the various passions so powerfully, was greatly disappointed. When "Messidor" was produced on February 19, 1897, it achieved little more than a *succfa d'es-*

¹ "Messidor" was the tenth or harvest month in the calendar of the First Republic.

² The writer does not know when Zola wrote the libretto of "Messidor " ; but it seems likely that he did so in 1894 or 1895, for M. Bruneau must have subsequently required considerable time for the music.